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In Reply Refer To:
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Information Bulletin No. RS-97-003

To: All State Directors (except Alaska, Eastern States,
Idaho, Montana, and Oregon)

From: Director, National Applied Resource Sciences Center

Subject: Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (CRBSCF)
55th Meeting

On October 23, 1996, the CRBSCF met at Palm Desert, California (Attachment 1). Earlier in the week, the Forum's Workgroup and Federal Advisory Council also met. Lee Barkow and Eric Janes participated in these meetings. Doug Romoli of the California Desert District attended the Advisory Council and the October 22 Forum Tour. This IB summarizes these meetings and other recent developments.

The BLM FY 96 accomplishments were presented to the Advisory Council, and a program update report was given to the Forum. The Forum's Workgroup was briefed on the fundamentals of rangeland health, standards, and guidelines in relation to water quality improvement.

Positive comments were received on BLM's actions to reduce salt loading. During the Workgroup and Advisory Council meetings, the Colorado Water Conservation Board, the Arizona Department of Water Resources, and Jack Barnett all noted that the Basin States appreciate the BLM's efforts in 1996 to improve the accountability and tracking of salt-load-reducing actions and expenditures in all programs. They encouraged the BLM to work to refine these data.

The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) program is changing, as noted in earlier correspondence. The July 1995 passage of Public Law 104-20, which amends the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act, has shifted the BOR program from being dependent upon project-specific Congressional authorization (1973-95) to a new basinwide program relying on existing BOR procurement authority and a "Request for Proposals" process (to the private and public

sectors). Proposals are ranked, based on \$/ton of salt removal effectiveness and risk factors, by representatives of the Federal Government and the Basin States. The contract officer may award a contract or issue a grant or construction cooperative agreement.

The BOR Regional Office in Salt Lake City is presently negotiating final-agreement terms with the five highest ranked project proponents for the FY 97 \$5.5 million Congressional appropriation. These projects are (1) the Hammond Irrigation District Project in Farmington; (2) the Castle Valley-Cottonwood Creek proposal in the Price-San Rafael Rivers area of Utah; (3) the Ferron Watershed Proposal on Ferron Creek in the vicinity of Ferron, Utah; (4) the Wellington Proposal, which is in the Price River drainage just downstream from the city of Price, Utah; and (5) the Navajo Saline Wells Proposal on the Navajo Reservation. The BOR allowed their cooperative agreement with Aqua-Chem (Glenwood-Dotsero Unit) to expire last June.

Although any salinity reduction proposal can be evaluated under BOR's ranking procedures, some proposals recommended for implementation **might not** be funded by BOR if they fall within the bounds of some other agency's authorities. For example, we in the BLM are responsible for reducing salt loading from saline rangelands under our jurisdiction, as authorized by P.L. 98-569. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is responsible for rangeland and on-farm irrigation improvements on private lands (through salinity control measures). And the EPA is working with the Basin States to administer a pollution discharge permitting program that sets point discharge standards for salinity and provides financial assistance for publicly owned treatment works.

Following two regional public meetings on the 1996 Review (held this fall in Phoenix and Salt Lake City), the Forum's Workgroup met and prepared a supplemental report to the Review, addressing, in particular, concerns of the Imperial Irrigation District (IID), Imperial, California. The IID letter (Attachment 2) and public statement in Phoenix urged an acceleration of salinity controls based on the belief that, without the favorable above-average flows of the past decade, the salinity of the river would exceed the numeric criteria at Imperial Dam. The IID has also requested that the Forum again consider weather modification as an option to reduce salinity concentrations in runoff. The Forum has been urged by the IID to work with the BOR to update the estimates of economic damages to the Lower Basin, including lower crop yields, increased water use needed to obtain a soil-salt balance, and strict drain water quality requirements. The previous estimates of \$700 million annual damages are expected to exceed \$1 billion by 2015 if further control measures are not implemented.

If you have any questions or desire additional details, please contact Eric Janes at (303) 236-0147.

2 Attachments

- 1 - Forum Agenda (2 pp)
- 2 - IID Letter (2 pp)

Distribution

WO-101, MIB, Rm 5651
WO-200, MIB, Rm 5650
WO-220, Tim Hartzell, LS, Rm 1000
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